



Centro de
Rehabilitación,
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Árbol de la Vida (Tree of Life)

A Contextually Grounded Model for Occupational Therapy Practice

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Introduction

In contrast to individualistic Western Culture, in some cultures there may be a sense of family or group based identity. The “self” is not seen as an independent entity, but as a part of a social group, therefore, the social context holds the key to a client being able to realize their maximal occupational potential. The *Árbol de la Vida* (Tree of Life) Model uses a tree to represent schematically the context centered occupational therapy process. Traditionally, bottom-up assessments tend to examine small, separate components of a client’s skills or occupational performance components. This model places the most global components on the ground and builds from there up.

The Forest represents the *social environment*.

Individuals trees make up the forest and they all are rooted in the same earth. While one can be uprooted from ones physical and social environment it is difficult to reestablish oneself in another environment and is best done with support.



The Ground represents the *physical environment*. The quality of the soil and stability of the earth influences the growth of the tree as the natural and human built environment influences occupational potential.

Western Culture - Emphasis on:

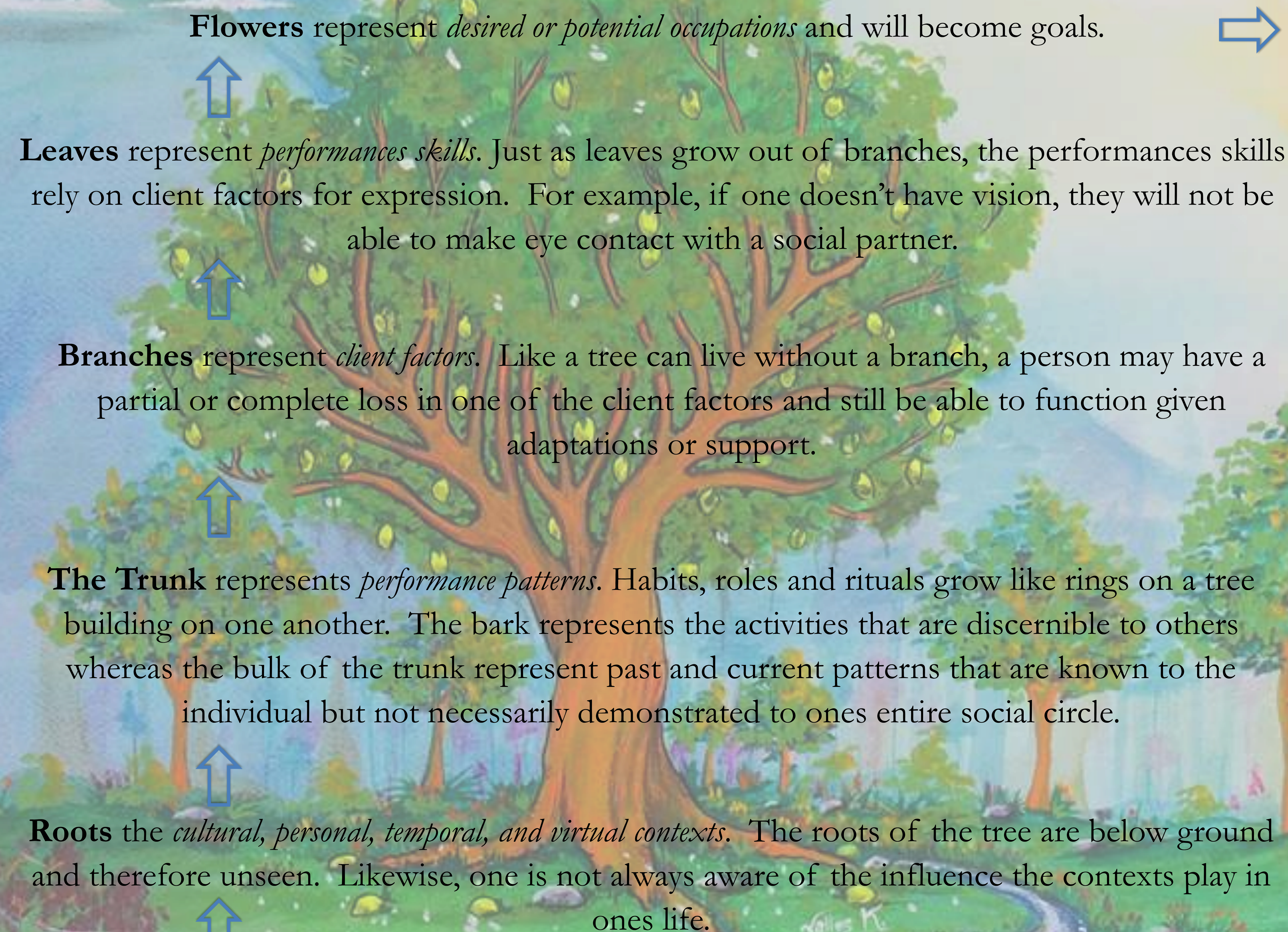
- Autonomy
- Separation
- Importance of the individual over the social group

Non-western Culture - Emphasis on:

- Group identity

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association, OTPF, (2014).
- American Occupational Therapy Association, Occupational Profile, (2017).
- Brown T, Chien C (2010).
- McCarthy (2012).
- World Health Organization. ICF Checklist, Version 2.1a,(September 2003).



Fruit represent *occupations*. As occupations give meaning and purpose to life, fruit provides food for life and the seeds within the fruit promote ongoing expressions of life.



Sun, rain and wind represent *barriers and supports* for change. Trees need sun and rain to grow, but too much of either can be harmful. Wind can be pleasant and help carry seeds, but in extreme cases can destroy the tree. Likewise, some actions can be both a barrier or a support to a person depending on how it presents.

Conclusions

This model has been used in Ecuador to guide evaluations and to better demonstrate that prior to looking at client factors and performance one must understand the social and physical environment and build rapport with the client by showing interest in their family and social groups. While the *Árbol de la Vida* Model has been developed while working with clients in Ecuador, it could be used across populations globally.